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FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9862
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 2295
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO PRIORITY 0367
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000419

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TAGS: PGOV PREL KDEM ASEC HA

SUBJECT: FIRST ROUND OF HAITI'S PARTIAL SENATE ELECTIONS
LARGELY CALM

REF: PORT AU PRINCE 411

Classified By: Amb. Janet A. Sanderson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Voting in the first round of partial Senate elections (reftel) took place April 19 in Haiti's ten departments with only one major incident. The Embassy's 29 observers saw that voting materials had generally been delivered to polling stations on time, trained poll workers effectively oversaw the voting process, and voters were generally not subject to threats or intimidation. Embassy believes that low voter interest in a mid-term election, confusion over voting sites, and a controversial decision to strictly limit vehicular traffic on election day led to the apparently low voter turnout, which MINUSTAH estimated at 10-20 percent. OAS sources privately place the figure at 5-7 percent. We expect results to trickle in gradually the week of April 20.

¶2. (C) The one significant incident of violence occurred in the Center department. The Provisional Electoral Council (CEP) suspended voting in the entire Center department after an electoral worker was shot in Mirebalais and unknown perpetrators stole ballot boxes in some voting centers. Before noon on election day, MINUSTAH had dispatched fifteen Formed Police Unit members and thirty Bolivian troops to Mirebalais to help the Haitian National Police (HNP) and UNPOL security personnel maintain order. SRSG Hedi Annabi privately criticized the CEP decision to suspend voting in the Central Plateau, saying that the small percentage (11 percent) of polling stations affected did not justify canceling the election in the entire department. The CEP later announced that the new date for elections in the Center would be determined in consultation with Haitian and UN security forces. Annabi noted that a re-run of elections in the Center would be easier to secure, since MINUSTAH and the Haitian National Police could focus their resources on a single department. In a conversation with Ambassador shortly after the announcement, CEP President Frantz-Gerard Verret said that Ministry of Interior, MINUSTAH, and HNP officials urged him to suspend voting before violence spread to "fragile areas."

¶3. (SBU) In the Artibonite, some voting centers in Verrettes, Petite Riviere, and Dessalines were closed after unknown perpetrators threw rocks and threatened some polling sites. In the West department, some polling stations opened late and shots were fired in the Martissant and Cite Soleil neighborhoods of the capital. In an isolated incident, a supporter of the Union party candidate was beaten by unknown

men while handing out hot meals from her vehicle; the alleged attackers were later questioned and released. A campaign worker alleged they were from Lespwa. Even in these three departments, voting largely unfolded as planned. There were isolated, unconfirmed reports of ballot stuffing in a small number of polling stations. Few or none of the disturbances appeared to be the work of Fanmi Lavalas partisans, whom many had suspected would attempt to disrupt the voting. CEP Director General Pierre-Louis Opont publicly praised Lavalas for not hindering the elections despite the latter's promotion of an elections boycott.

¶4. (U) President Rene Preval and Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis each voted early in the afternoon at their respective polling stations. Preval noted he returned early from the Summit of the Americas to vote; he deflected questions about the closure of polls in the Center, saying that the CEP made its decision independently.

¶5. (SBU) Embassy's initial assessment is that Haiti's electoral authority, aided by MINUSTAH's logistics and planning and by bilateral donors' programs, ran a reasonably proficient election from the technical standpoint. Despite serious delays in hiring polling station personnel, most appeared adequately trained and up to the job. The great majority of polling stations visited by Embassy personnel also had poll watchers from one or more political parties and Haitian NGOs specializing in election monitoring. The CEP's civic education campaign, as well as spirited media debates among candidates in many departments, had raised voter interest in the several weeks prior to the election. While

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Embassy cannot assess the degree to which the disqualification of Fanmi Lavalas candidates depressed turnout, there were other major contributing factors. The doubling of the number of election centers (each of which is divided into five to more than thirty polling places) mandated by the election law passed last year led to confusion among many voters as to where they should vote. Limitations on most vehicular traffic, imposed as a security precaution, meant that some voters stayed at home rather than walking long distances to their voting center. Turnout in purely legislative elections in recent years has not been high. Embassy will report election results when they come in.
SANDERSON